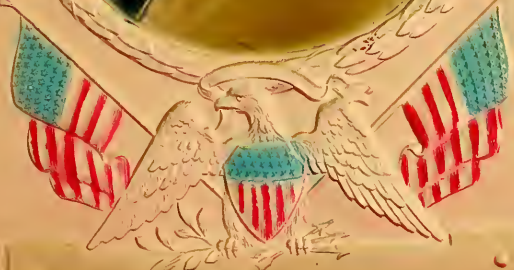


1809

12th Feb.

1909




Lincoln

IN MEMORY OF THE CENTENNIAL
ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH.

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LINCOLNIANA BROCHURE



BY
HAL W. TROVILLION

1909

PRIVATELY PRINTED
HERRIN, ILL. FEBRUARY MCMIX

127 copies

"AMERICA means opportunity," once wrote Emerson. A better and more concise comparison between this country and the other nations of the world could not have been drawn. Nothing comes nearer than the life of Abraham Lincoln of perfectly illustrating the possibilities of American opportunities. Born at the very outskirts of civilization, of untaught parents, the cold and uncompromising world seemed to have set itself against his rise from the beginning. He was surrounded by the many disadvantages of pioneer life. Ignorance and poverty handicapped him. To all of these embarrassments there was added the example of a restless, indolent, often-discouraged father, who was one of life's failures, which set before this much encumbered lad, whom nature had even denied the simple favor of good looks, a very defective model after which to fashion his own life. But unfortunately handicapped as he

was, Lincoln never once paused in his struggle for self-improvement. Amid discouragements black as midnight he did not lose his way. Upward and onward he was always trudging. Steadily and unerringly, ever planning and constructing, slowly but surely and honestly, he was rearing to American citizenship a great and grand and enduring character which was destined to become a beacon light of influence to the whole of the civilized world.

Much, it is true, has been written of this great Peasant Prince of America—more, with the possible exception of Napoleon, within the past century than any other man—his life and character even at this distant day are sources of such helpful strength and pure inspiration to good, strong, healthy citizenship that it would be quite impossible to over-discuss or over-study this “First American” as the poet Lowell has fittingly called him.

The life of Lincoln is a complete and finished story. There are no periods shrouded in mystery. It is from

the start, as he himself once said, "the short and simple annals of the poor." We do not have to deal with suppositions and probabilities when we attempt to follow his life course. It is a plain, frankly printed page from the sad night when as a little ragged boy of ten he stood alone in a western wilderness beside his good mother's grave, looked up at the stars and wept, until forty-six years later that serious man stood before the distinguished and illustrious of the land, and in his second inaugural, all but wept as he closed his grave utterance with the faithful words, "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." His life was lived ever above board. His deeds had their birth in the noon hour. In his everyday life there were no dark, secret chambers whose doors were barred and bolted against his friends. No man called him a mystery. He was not strange and hard to understand. The rays of the full day sun touched every public and private act of his life and was reflected back in a thousand fold brilliancy that revealed a noble

and honest career. Focus the microscope upon any period of his life and there will be found everywhere that same, unfagging tendency toward self-improvement, ennobling honesty, right thinking and careful living. Take Lincoln, the boy. His days were spent at hard labor, conquering an American wilderness with all of the hardships of frontier life. The midnight often passed and found the lad not in bed, but in the dim light of the candle drip, deeply buried in a book which he had with great difficulty probably borrowed of a neighbor who dwelt miles away. And such books as he had, look too what great human documents they were — "Æsop's Fables," "Robinson Crusoe," "Pilgrim's Progress," a volume of Burns, of Shakespear, and that great book of all books, the Bible — any one of them when read as Lincoln read them has the power to make of a person a profound man. Now, follow for a moment Lincoln, the young man, as he quits the state of Indiana and comes into the new land of Illinois. He had just reached his majority, and he real-

ized it was the threshold of responsibility. How prepared he was for the battle of life in this new country considering the hardships and handicaps which he had experienced! No bad habits had fastened themselves upon his vigorous life to thwart his ambitions. He had succeeded early in establishing a good balance between that rough and ready life of force and fight of the pioneer and the patient, sympathetic and intellectual life of the man of the world. Let us have from the pen of his life-long friend and law partner, William H. Herndon, a picture of this lad of destiny when he appeared in Illinois as a newcomer:

“This man, this long, bony, wiry, sad man, floated into our country in 1831, in a frail canoe, down the north fork of the Sangamon river friendless, penniless, powerless and alone—begging for work in this city—ragged, struggling for the common necessities of life. This man, this peculiar man, left us in 1861, the President of the United States, backed by friends and power, by fame, and all human force; and it is well to inquire how.

“To sum up, let us say, here is a sensitive, diffident, unobtrusive, natural-made gentleman. His mind was strong and deep, sincere and honest, patient and enduring; having no vices, and having only negative defects, with many positive virtues. His is a strong, honest, sagacious, manly, noble life. He stands in the foremost rank of men in all ages—their equal—one of the best types of this Christian civilization.”

But Lincoln is gone. We shall probably never have another. The present generation owes to the oncoming age the duty of perpetuating his memory. And if we can but keep alive in this growing, busy, swiftly running nation “where wealth accumulates and men decay,” where principles are constantly changing, the spirit of the great, noble Peasant Prince, we shall have passed on to the sons and daughters that come after us a priceless heirloom which will rear up a nation of strong, sympathetic, honest manhood whose power in the world for good shall produce fit types for modern civilization.

To foster such a spirit among those into whose hands this little brochure may fall is my only purpose in compiling the following excerpts from the writings and speeches of Lincoln, the one hundredth anniversary of whose birth the entire nation will commemorate on the 12th day of February, 1909.

LINCOLN'S OWN STORY.

[When Lincoln was first nominated for the Presidency there was a demand in all portions of the country for biographical sketches. At that time he prepared, at the suggestion of an intimate friend, this frank autobiography.]

I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin county, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families — second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon county, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham county, Virginia, to Kentucky about 1781 or 1782, where a year

or two later he was killed by the Indians, not in a battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks county, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer county, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond "readin', writin', and cipherin'" to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as

a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-one I came to Illinois, Macon county. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard county, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store.

Then came the Black Hawk war; and I was elected a captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten—the only time I ever have been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding bien-

nial elections I was elected to the legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower house of congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics; and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

Springfield, December 20, 1859.

FIRST PUBLIC ADDRESS.

[Lincoln was twenty three years old when he made his first public speech at New Salem, Ill., in 1832, when he made the race for the legislature and was defeated—the only time, however, he was ever beaten by a direct vote of the people. This speech is noted for its simple, direct and rhythmic wording which afterwards became so characteristic of his style.]

Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it is true or not, I can say, for one, that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow-men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem. How far I shall succeed in gratifying this ambition is yet to be developed. I am young, and unknown to many of you. I was born, and have ever remained, in the most humble walks of life. I have no wealthy or popular relations or friends to recommend me. My case is thrown exclusively upon the independent voters of the country; and, if elected, they will have conferred a favor upon me for which I shall be unremitting in my labors to compensate. But, if the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined.

EARLY LOVE LETTERS.

[Miss Owens, to whom these letters were written, years afterward explained that she refused Lincoln because he was "deficient in those little links which go to make up the chain of a woman's happiness"]

SPRINGFIELD, ILL., 7 May, 1837.

Friend Mary: I have commenced two letters to send you before this, both of which displeased me before I got half done, and so I tore them up. The first I thought was not serious enough, and the second was on the other extreme. I shall send this, turn out as it may.

This thing of living in Springfield is rather a dull business, after all; at least it is so to me. I am quite as lonesome here as I ever was anywhere in my life. I have been spoken to by but one woman since I have been here, and should not have been by her if she could have avoided it. I've never been to church yet, and probably shall not be soon. I stay away because I am conscious I should not know how to behave myself.

I am often thinking of what we said about your coming to live at Springfield. I am afraid you would not be satisfied. There is a great deal of flourishing about in carriages here, which it would be your doom to see without sharing it. You would have to be poor, without the means of hiding your poverty. Do you believe you could bear that patiently? What-

ever woman may cast her lot with mine, should any ever do so, it is my intention to do all in my power to make her happy and contented; and there is nothing I can imagine that would make me more unhappy than to fail in the effort. I know I should be much happier with you than the way I am, provided I saw no signs of discontent in you. What you have said to me may have been in the way of jest, or I may have misunderstood it. If so, then let it be forgotten; if otherwise, I much wish you would think seriously before you decided. What I have said I will most positively abide by, provided you wish it. My opinion is that you had better not do it. You have not been accustomed to hardship, and it may be more severe than you now imagine. I know you are capable of thinking correctly on any subject, and if you deliberate maturely upon this before you decide, then I am willing to abide your decision.

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, 16 August, 1837.

Friend Mary: You will no doubt think it rather strange that I should write you a letter on the same day on which we parted, and I can only account for it by supposing that seeing you lately makes me think of you more than usual; while at our late meeting we had but few expressions of thoughts. You must know that I cannot see you or think of you with en-

tire indifference; and yet it may be that you are mistaken in regard to what my real feelings towards you are. If I knew you were not, I should not trouble you with this letter. Perhaps any other man would know enough without further information; but I consider it my peculiar right to plead ignorance, and your bounden duty to allow the plea. I want in all cases to do right, and most particularly so in all cases with women. I want at this particular time, more than anything else, to do right with you; and if I knew it would be doing right, as I rather suspect it would, to let you alone, I would do it. And for the purpose of making the matter as plain as possible, I now say that you can drop the subject, dismiss your thoughts (if you ever had any) from me forever, and leave this letter unanswered, without calling forth one accusing murmur from me. And I will even go further, and say if it will add anything to your comfort or peace of mind to do so, it is my sincere wish that you should. Do not understand by this that I wish to cut your acquaintance. I mean no such thing. What I do wish is that our further acquaintance shall depend upon yourself. If such further acquaintance would contribute nothing to your happiness, I am sure that it would not to mine. If you feel yourself in any degree bound to me, I am now willing to release you, provided you

wish it; while, on the other hand, I am willing and even anxious to bind you faster, if I can be convinced that it will, in any considerable degree, add to your happiness. This, indeed, is the whole question with me. Nothing would make me more miserable than to believe that you are miserable—nothing more happy than to know you were so.

In what I have now said, I think I cannot be misunderstood, and to make myself understood is the only object of this letter.

If it suits you best not to answer this, farewell. A long life and a merry one attend you. But if you conclude to write back, speak as plainly as I do. There can be neither harm nor danger in saying to me anything you think, just in the matter you think it.

TO A CONFIDING WOMAN.

SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS, 1 April, 1838.

Dear Madam: Without apologizing for being egotistical, I shall make the history of so much of my life as had elapsed since I saw you the subject of this letter. And, by the way, I now discover that in order to give a full and intelligible account of the things I have done and suffered since I saw you, I shall necessarily have to relate some that happened before.

It was, then, in the autumn of 1836 that a married lady of my acquaintance, and who was

a great friend of mine, being about to pay a visit to her father and other relatives residing in Kentucky, proposed to me that on her return she would bring a sister of hers with her on condition that I would engage to become her brother-in-law with all convenient dispatch. I, of course, accepted the proposal, for you know I could not have done otherwise had I really been averse to it; but privately, between you and me, I was most confoundly well pleased with the project. I had seen the said sister some three years before, thought her intelligent and agreeable, and saw no good objection to plodding life through hand in hand with her. Time passed on, that lady took her journey, and in due time returned, sister in company, sure enough. This astonished me a little, for it appeared to me that her coming so readily showed she was a trifle too willing, but on reflection it occurred to me that she might have been prevailed on by her married sister to come, without anything concerning me ever having been mentioned to her, and so I concluded that if no other objection presented itself, I would consent to waive this. All this occurred to me on hearing of her arrival in the neighborhood—for, be it remembered, I had not seen her, except about three years previous, as above mentioned. In a few days we had an interview, and, although I had seen her before, she did not look as my imagination had pictured

her. I knew she was over-size, but she now appeared a fair match for Falstaff. I knew she was called an "old maid," and I felt no doubt of the truth of at least one-half of the appellation, but now, when I beheld her, I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother; and this, not from withered features,—for her skin was too full of fat to permit of its contracting into wrinkles,—but from her want of teeth, weather-beaten appearance in general, and from a kind of notion that ran in my head that nothing could have commenced at the size of infancy and reached her present bulk in less than thirty-five or forty years; and, in short, I was not at all pleased with her. But what could I do? I had told her sister I would take her for better or worse, and I made a point of honor and conscience in all things to stick to my word, especially if others had been induced to act on it, which in this case I had no doubt they had, for I was now fairly convinced that no other man on earth would have her, and hence the conclusion that they were bent on holding me to my bargain. "Well," thought I, "I have said it, and, be the consequences what they may, it shall not be my fault if I fail to do it." At once I determined to consider her my wife, and this done, all my powers of discovery were put to work in search of perfections in her that might be fairly set off against her defects. I tried to imagine her handsome,

which, but for unfortunate corpulency, was actually true. Exclusive of this, no woman that I have ever seen has a finer face. I also tried to convince myself that the mind was much more to be valued than the person, and in this she was not inferior, as I could discover, to and with whom I had been acquainted.

Shortly after this, without attempting to come to any positive understanding with her, I set out for Vandalia, when and where you first saw me. During my stay there I had letters from her which did not change my opinion of either her intellect or intention, but on the contrary, confirmed it in both.

All this while, although I was fixed "firm, surge-repelling rock" in my resolution, I found I was continually repenting the rashness which had led me to make it. Through my life I have been in no bondage, either real or imaginary, from the thralldom of which I so much desired to be free. After my return home I saw nothing to change my opinion of her in any particular. She was the same, and so was I. I now spent my time in planning how I might get along in life after my contemplated change of circumstances should have taken place, and how I might procrastinate the evil day for a time, which I really dreaded as much, perhaps more, than an Irishman does the halter.

After all my sufferings upon this deeply interesting subject, here I am, wholly, unexpectedly, completely out of the "scrape," and now I want to know if you can guess how I got out of it—out, clear in every sense of the term—no violation of word, honor, or conscience. I don't believe you can guess, and so I might as well tell you at once. As the lawyer says, it was done in the manner following, to-wit: After I had delayed the matter as long as I thought I could in honor do (which, by the way, had brought me round into last fall), I concluded I might as well bring it to a consummation as without further delay, and so I mustered my resolution and made the proposal to her direct; but, shocking to relate, she answered, No. At first I supposed she did it through an affectation of modesty, which I thought but ill became her under the peculiar circumstances of her case, but on my renewal of the charge I found she repelled it with greater firmness than before. I tried it again and again, but with the same success, or rather with the want of success.

I finally was forced to give it up, at which I very unexpectedly found myself mortified almost beyond endurance, I was mortified, it seemed to me, in a hundred different ways. My vanity was deeply wounded by reflection that I had so long been too stupid to discover her intentions, and at the same time never doubting that I

understood her perfectly; and also that she, whom I had taught myself to believe nobody else would have, had actually rejected me with all my fancied greatness. And, to cap the whole, I then for the first time began to suspect that I was really a little in love with her. But let it all go! I'll try and outlive it. Others have been made fools of by the girls, but this can never with truth be said of me. I most emphatically, in this instance, made a fool of myself. I have now come to the conclusion never again to think of marrying, and for this reason—I can never be satisfied with any one who would be blockhead enough to have me.

When you receive this, write me a long yarn about something to amuse me. Give my respects to Mr. Browning.

GETTYSBURG ADDRESS.

(Delivered at the dedication of the cemetery at
Gettysburg, November 19, 1863.)

[It seems incredible at this day that Lincoln's Gettysburg speech proved a disappointment, not only to Lincoln, but to many who heard it. On the return trip to Washington, he said: "That speech fell on the audience like a wet blanket. I ought to have prepared it with more care." He, himself, failed to appreciate the sublime sentiment of the few words he had hastily scribbled that morning with a

lead pencil on a pad in the railway carriage. Time has proved them equal to the sayings of any man who ever wrote his mother tongue.]

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men living and dead who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased

devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.



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